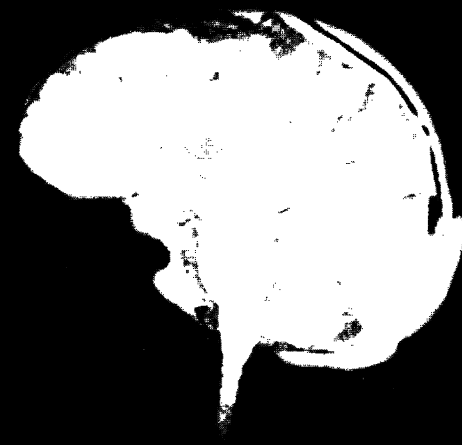
NEUROLOGY

FROM BASICS TO BEDSIDE



Neurology

THIS SPECIAL ISSUE of THE WESTERN JOURNAL OF MEDICINE takes us from bench to bedside, from cradle (and before) to grave, from diagnosis to treatment, from training to practice. We are taken from the common to the unimaginable, from the past to the future, from theoretical and practical to ethics and policy. Conditions may be acute or chronic and may require intensive care or rehabilitation.

Stephen Hauser, MD, Chair of the Department of Neurology at the University of California, San Francisco, School of Medicine, has been the inspired and inspiring special editor, a visionary leader, and persuader of his distinguished authors. We readers, patients, families, policy makers, and the public are grateful.

LINDA HAWES CLEVER, MD

Introduction

NEUROLOGY HAS ENTERED a new era. Long considered an intellectually rich but therapeutically impoverished discipline, neurologists have traditionally functioned as prestidigitators in the spectacle of medicine, capable of astonishing displays of anatomic localization, pathologic inference and diagnosis, but with services that are ultimately limited to the education of patients or referring physicians. Medical students frequently have been heard to comment that neurology is an interesting but depressing specialty.

In the mass media or in literature, also, we neurologists tend to be treated unkindly. The most frequent image is that of the mad scientist, brilliant but deranged, the villain who exploits neuroscience for evil or twisted purposes: Dr Frankenstein; or Frank MacLeary, cadaveric organ dealer in Robin Cook's *Coma*. On occasion, a more sympathetic image presents neurologists as lovable but disheveled nerds, socially infantile, well-meaning, but ultimately ineffective. We suspect that orthopedists would not have tolerated the public image that neurologists have endured in silence for so long.

I hope that this issue of THE WESTERN JOURNAL OF MEDICINE will contribute in a small way to a changing perception of neurology. Each of three sections will focus on a different aspect of progress and change in the field. A remarkable and distinguished group of contributors will guide readers through this rapidly changing terrain.

Within the past decade, molecular biology has transformed neurology more dramatically and more rapidly than even its most visionary proponents would have dared to predict. Genetic linkage approaches have resulted, as of this writing, in the identification of more than 50 neurologic disease genes and in the chromosomal localization of several hundred more. The genes responsible for some of the most common and mysterious nervous system diseases, including Duchenne-type muscular dystrophy (dystrophin), myotonic dystrophy (CTG repeat 3′ of myotonin), Huntington's disease (huntingtin), Charcot-Marie-